

In the United States Court of Federal Claims
OFFICE OF SPECIAL MASTERS
No. 22-670V

EMMA RUNYON,

Petitioner,

v.

SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES,

Respondent.

Chief Special Master Corcoran

Filed: July 31, 2025

Leah VaSahnja Durant, Law Offices of Leah V. Durant, PLLC, Washington, DC, for Petitioner.

Debra A. Filteau Begley, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC, for Respondent.

DECISION ON ATTORNEY'S FEES AND COSTS¹

On June 15, 2022, Emma Runyon filed a petition for compensation under the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, 42 U.S.C. §300aa-10, *et seq.*² (the "Vaccine Act"). Petitioner alleged that she suffered a shoulder injury related to vaccine administration as a result of an influenza vaccine she received on September 21, 2020. Petition at 1. On February 14, 2025, I issued a decision awarding compensation to Petitioner based on the Respondent's proffer. ECF No. 36.

¹ Because this Decision contains a reasoned explanation for the action taken in this case, it must be made publicly accessible and will be posted on the United States Court of Federal Claims' website, and/or at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/uscourts/national/cofc>, in accordance with the E-Government Act of 2002. 44 U.S.C. § 3501 note (2018) (Federal Management and Promotion of Electronic Government Services). **This means the Decision will be available to anyone with access to the internet.** In accordance with Vaccine Rule 18(b), Petitioner has 14 days to identify and move to redact medical or other information, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy. If, upon review, I agree that the identified material fits within this definition, I will redact such material from public access.

² National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3755. Hereinafter, for ease of citation, all section references to the Vaccine Act will be to the pertinent subparagraph of 42 U.S.C. § 300aa (2018).

Petitioner has now filed an amended motion for attorney's fees and costs, requesting an award of \$29,051.74 (representing \$26,647.00 in fees plus \$2,404.74 in costs). Motion to Amend/Correct the Motion for Attorney's Fees, filed on May 20, 2025. ECF No. 41. Furthermore, Petitioner filed a signed statement representing that no personal out-of-pocket expenses were incurred. ECF No. 40 at 2. Respondent did not file a response.

I have reviewed the billing records submitted with Petitioner's requests and find a reduction in the amount of fees to be awarded appropriate, for the reasons set forth below.

ANALYSIS

The Vaccine Act permits an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs for successful claimants. Section 15(e). Counsel must submit fee requests that include contemporaneous and specific billing records indicating the service performed, the number of hours expended on the service, and the name of the person performing the service. See *Savin v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 85 Fed. Cl. 313, 316-18 (2008). Counsel should not include in their fee requests hours that are "excessive, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary." *Saxton v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 3 F.3d 1517, 1521 (Fed. Cir. 1993) (quoting *Hensley v. Eckerhart*, 461 U.S. 424, 434 (1983)). It is "well within the special master's discretion to reduce the hours to a number that, in [her] experience and judgment, [is] reasonable for the work done." *Id.* at 1522. Furthermore, the special master may reduce a fee request *sua sponte*, apart from objections raised by respondent and without providing a petitioner notice and opportunity to respond. See *Sabella v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 86 Fed. Cl. 201, 209 (2009). A special master need not engage in a line-by-line analysis of petitioner's fee application when reducing fees. *Broekelschen v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 102 Fed. Cl. 719, 729 (2011).

The petitioner "bears the burden of establishing the hours expended, the rates charged, and the expenses incurred." *Wasson v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 24 Cl. Ct. 482, 484 (1991). The Petitioner "should present adequate proof [of the attorney's fees and costs sought] at the time of the submission." *Wasson*, 24 Cl. Ct. at 484 n.1. Petitioner's counsel "should make a good faith effort to exclude from a fee request hours that are excessive, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary, just as a lawyer in private practice ethically is obligated to exclude such hours from his fee submission." *Hensley*, 461 U.S. at 434.

ATTORNEY FEES

The hourly rates requested by attorneys Leah Durant, Glenn MacLeod, Richard Amada, Mike Milmoie, and their supporting paralegals through the end of 2024, are reasonable and consistent with our prior determinations and will therefore be adopted. However, the proposed hourly rate of \$475.00 for 2024, and \$508.00 for 2025, billed by Elizabeth Vitt, and the rate of \$550.00 for 2025 time billed by Ms. Durant require further evaluation and adjustment.

Attorney Durant was previously awarded the *lesser* rates of \$530.00 for work performed in 2025. See *Jackman v. Sec'y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 23-1749, Slip Op. 36 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. June 24, 2025). I find no reason to deviate from such reasoned determination and it otherwise is not the practice of OSM to adjust prior rate determinations upward in later cases. See *Jefferson v. Sec'y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 19-1882V, 2023 WL 387051 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Jan. 9, 2023). Accordingly, I hereby reduce Ms. Durant's rate for work performed in 2025 to be consistent with the aforementioned decision. **Application of the foregoing reduces the amount of fees to be awarded by \$100.00.**³

Attorney Elizabeth Vitt has been a licensed attorney since 2006, placing her in the range of attorneys with 11-19 years' experience based on the OSM Attorneys' Forum Hourly Rate Fee Schedules.⁴ I incorporate by reference all of the explanatory notes contained in these rate schedules.

Although her proposed rate of \$475.00 in 2024, and \$508.00 in 2025, falls within the relevant experience range provided in these ranges for similarly-situated attorneys, I find her specifically-requested rates to be excessive based on her lack of experience representing petitioners in the Vaccine Program. See *McCulloch v. Health & Human Services*, No. 09-293V, 2015 WL 5634323, at *17 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Sept. 1, 2015) (stating the following factors are paramount in deciding a reasonable forum hourly rate: experience in the Vaccine Program, overall legal experience, the quality of work performed, and the reputation in the legal community and community at large).

³ This amount consists of reduce Leah Durant's 2025 hourly rate and is calculated as follows (\$550.00 - \$530.00 = \$20.00 x 5.00 hours billed) = \$100.00 in fees to be reduced.

⁴ The OSM Attorneys' Fee Schedule is available at; <https://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/osm-attorneys-forum-hourly-rate-fee-schedules>

Additionally, Ms. Vitt only recently admitted to this Court as of October 2024; therefore, improper for her to receive hourly rates on the higher end of the experience ranges, when those rates are reserved for attorneys who also have lengthy experience representing petitioners in the Vaccine Program. Thus, based on the factors relevant to determining proper hourly rates for Vaccine Program attorneys, I find that a rate of **\$430.00** is appropriate for Ms. Vitt's time in 2024, and **\$460.00** is appropriate for her time in 2025. **Application of the foregoing reduces the fees to be awarded by \$292.80.**⁵

ATTORNEY'S COSTS

Petitioner has otherwise provided supporting documentation for all claimed costs. ECF No. 38-2. Respondent offered no specific objection to the rates or amounts sought. I find the requested costs reasonable and hereby award them in full.

CONCLUSION

The Vaccine Act permits an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs for successful claimants. Section 15(e). Accordingly, I hereby GRANT, in part, Petitioner's Motion for attorney's fees and costs. I award a total of **\$28,658.94 (representing \$26,254.20 in fees plus \$2,404.74 in costs) to be paid through an ACH deposit to Petitioner's counsel's IOLTA account for prompt disbursement.** In the absence of a timely-filed motion for review (see Appendix B to the Rules of the Court), the Clerk of Court shall enter judgment in accordance with this Decision.⁶

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/Brian H. Corcoran
 Brian H. Corcoran
 Chief Special Master

⁵ This amount consists of reducing Elizabeth Vitt's 2024 & 2025 hourly rates and is calculated as follows: (\$475.00 - \$430.00 = \$45.00 x 4.80 hours billed) + (\$508.00 - \$460.00 = \$48.00 x 1.60 hours billed) = \$292.80 in fees to be reduced.

⁶ Pursuant to Vaccine Rule 11(a), the parties may expedite entry of judgment by filing a joint notice renouncing their right to seek review.